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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001886

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STATE FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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TAGS: PGOV PREL EAID PINS SO
SUBJECT: SOMALIA - UNEASINESS AT PRESIDENCY

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Classified By: SPECIAL ENVOY JOHN YATES, REASON 1.4 (C) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: A series of telephone calls from President Yusuf, reinforced by multifarious other reports and rumors July 31, suggest a shaken Villa Somalia unnerved by and uncertain of Ethiopian intentions. The ongoing rift between Yusuf and Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein, with the latter's attempt to sack Benaadir governor and Mogadishu mayor Muhammad Umar Habeb, aka Mohammad Dheere, probably precipitated the panicky feelings, but at minimum exacerbated the uneasiness. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) President Yusuf telephoned Special Envoy Yates mid-day July 31 ostensibly to explain his position on the Prime Minister's attempt to dismiss Benaadir governor and Mogadishu mayor Muhammad Umar Habeb, aka Mohammad Dheere, but in reality, it now seems, to worry about indications of an Ethiopian withdrawal. At that point, Yusuf said, the threat was only rumors but given substance by Ethiopian forces leaving command posts near the former pasta factory and national stadium. He did acknowledge, as we had been told separately, the rotation out of the Ethiopian troops was made possible by the arrival of new Somali forces that had been trained by the Ethiopians. Yusuf said if the Ethiopians left before the arrival of UN or other international forces projected by the Djibouti Agreement, the Transitional Federal Government would be finished. He asked the Special Envoy if the United States knew Ethiopian intentions and if not, if we could find out. The Special Envoy agreed to pursue the question with Embassy Addis.

¶3. (C) Before there was any response to the first inquiry, SE Yates received an early evening call from Yusuf's staffer Hussein, who reported to have received a call a few minutes earlier from Ethiopian Force Commander Colonel Yohannes. The message Yohannes delivered, according to Hussein, was &We are withdrawing our forces from Mogadishu tonight and taking the artillery with us.8 Hussein said President Yusuf was deeply concerned over the purported Ethiopian announcement and had instructed him to call the Special Envoy to implore the Ethiopians to reverse the decision to withdraw until forces were available to replace them. The impossibility of TFG survivability without them was again invoked.

¶4. (S) In rapid order a series of further reports directly from other Somalis, or through other Embassy elements,

described increasingly dire developments either taking place or expected imminently. These included, inter alia: that Yusuf had abdicated or was about to; that he had requested safe passage from Mogadishu to his Puntland base; that Villa Somalia would be abandoned within 12-24 hours, and so on. Underpinning all the doom was said to be Ethiopian disgruntlement, with Yusuf's uncooperative handling of Prime Minister Hussein's attempt to dismiss Mohammed Dheere being the final straw (reftel). (COMMENT: We had been reliably told earlier in the day by a senior TFG official that in fact Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin had telephoned Yusuf and unsuccessfully tried to persuade the President to cooperate with his Prime Minister, rather than thwart him. END COMMENT). In any case, it was universally assumed that none of the calamitous happenings being predicted (or in some cases already reported as fact) would be possible without Ethiopian complicity.

¶5. (C) After consulting with the Department's Africa Bureau about the implications, including a possible request of the USG to provide Yusuf safe passage, the Special Envoy called President Yusuf late in the evening July 31 to try to discern directly from him what was actually transpiring. Yusuf immediately mentioned his vulnerability in the face of Ethiopian withdrawal, said he had neither forces nor materiel to hold out more than a couple of days and said he needed ammunition and small arms. He did not mention abdication, nor until prodded, possibly departing Villa Somalia. Yusuf subsequently acknowledged that there were contingency plans in place for him to go either to Puntland or to Kismayo if the situation warranted it. These plans, he indicated, had been in place for a long time, not newly developed for immediate execution.

¶6. (C) At light of day August 1, there was little indication
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that anything had actually happened or was about to, although considerable uncertainty prevailed. Reports from Embassy Addis Ababa, Mogadishu and locally that the Ethiopians were in the process of withdrawing seem grossly exaggerated. Today, Addis reports that one company of troops moved, but only within normal rotation redeployment. Late on July 31, Yusuf said the Ethiopians around Villa Somalia had departed and that he had requested additional AMISOM troops and now was being protected by them, his own Presidential Guard, and Mohammad Dheere's militia. On-the-scene observers in Mogadishu, however, report that Villa Somalia is still guarded by Ethiopian, AMISOM and TFG militia forces. Overnight the Ethiopians responded with mortar barrages to insurgent attacks; there seem to have been several engagements. Sources tell us al-Shabaab and other insurgents have undertaken to assure that the newly-arrived Somali security forces pay a price for fighting in the ranks of the TFG which explains the high frequency of attacks overnight and a prevailing concern for personal security by citizens throughout Mogadishu.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The situation is by no means clear or secure. It seems certain that the tensions between Ethiopians and the TFG (specifically Yusuf) persist. It seems probable that the Ethiopians are doing some feinting and obfuscating about their own intentions to put some pressure on President Yusuf. The TFG divide between the President and Prime Minister is now wider and deeper following the Mohammad Dheere snafu. We understand that a no confidence motion still to be debated by Parliament in Baidoa but the Prime Minister and his people feel that the votes to unseat him are not present so the storm can be weathered. Still, suspicions abound. Somali Director for Intelligence General Mohamad Warsame Farah "Darwish" is back in Nairobi meeting with various players under murky circumstances. Former Prime Minister Ali Gedi's presence looms. The TFG has limped through many previous crises but this one has a different, less definable feeling to it which bears close attention. Mogadishu, we are told, is eerily quiet this

Friday with most people staying off the streets in apparent anticipation of concerted violence.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT, CONT: To our mind, more immediacy on implementing the Djibouti Agreement with the TFG cooperating with the opposition partners might be the most promising course at this juncture--along with close monitoring and intervention with the principals whether in Mogadishu, Baidoa, Nairobi or Addis Ababa. END COMMENT.

SLUTZ